

## Lesson 5



Industrial smokestacks near San Diego National Wildlife Refuge—San Diego, California

# International Agreements

Students previously learned about some of the environmental issues present in the border region, the rapid population growth and its potential influence on the natural systems with resources already at issue, and the perspectives of different stakeholders in the issues in the region.

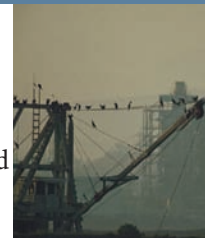
In this lesson, they examine three international efforts—The La Paz Agreement, the environmental provisions in NAFTA, and the Border 2012 Program. All are agreements between the United States and Mexico created to help resolve environmental issues affecting both countries.

After analyzing the purposes and goals of each of these efforts, students conclude the lesson by writing an essay in which they explain why environmental issues at the border require the cooperation and effort of both countries. In the end, students see that both countries

have made strides in implementing environmental laws and forming coalitions to assess and monitor quality of life in the border region, with the goal of preventing additional environmental problems as the population grows.

## Learning Objective

Identify treaties and conventions that regulate environmental issues shared by both the United States and Mexico.



signed by the United States and Mexico. At that time, the two countries also established the Border Environmental Cooperative Commission (BECC) and the North American Development Bank (NADB). These organizations work to help finance local communities that are trying to implement environmental infrastructure projects. Local, regional, and national leaders on both sides of the border felt the La Paz Agreement and NAFTA created an atmosphere for dialogue about environmental issues, yet neither encouraged much action. The Border 2012 Program's goals are synonymous with the goals of the La Paz Agreement—to reduce water, air, and land contamination, improve environmental health, establish emergency preparedness and response, and promote environmental stewardship. One of the reasons for the Border 2012 Program's success is that it brings together many different people and groups from the local, regional, and national levels.

The signing of NAFTA in 1993 made it one of the first international trade agreements to include a section on environmental issues. The United States and Mexico agreed to work cooperatively to address the environmental problems along the border including growth of population and industry in the border region.

## Background

The complex issues in the border region have prompted local, state, federal, and tribal governments to establish partnerships with the goal of creating programs and agreements to improve environmental conditions in the region. The first major agreement between the United States and Mexico was the La Paz Agreement. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which went into effect in 1994, included environmental provisions. Both of these agreements paved the way for the largest and most

comprehensive program, the Border 2012 Program. This endeavor is a collaboration between the federal governments of Mexico and the United States, state and local governments, community members, indigenous groups, and non-governmental organizations. The goal of the program is “to protect the environment and public health in the U.S.-Mexico border region, consistent with the principles of sustainable development.”

The 1983 La Paz Agreement was the first environmental agreement



Oil tank washed up on beach

## Key Vocabulary

**Convention:** An agreement between nations.

**Treaty:** An agreement or protocol between two or more nations to create or restrict rights and responsibilities.



# Toolbox



## Summary of Activities

Using a jigsaw approach, students learn about an international agreement, the environmental provisions in an international trade agreement, and a binational program designed to regulate environmental issues in the border region.



## Instructional Support

See Extensions & Unit Resources, page 32

### Prerequisite Knowledge



#### Students should have:

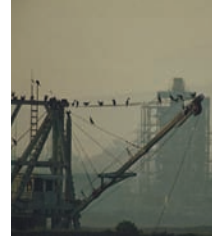
- completed previous lessons.

### Advanced Preparation



**Gather and prepare Activity Masters.**

**Gather and prepare Materials Needed.**



## Materials Needed



### Class supplies:

- pencils

## Visual Aids



No Visual Aids are required for this lesson.

## Duration



### Preparation Time

15 min.

### Instructional Time

55 min.



## Safety Notes

None

## Activity Masters in the Supporting Materials (SM)

### The La Paz Agreement

SM, Page 41  
One per student  
(one-third of class)

### NAFTA's Environmental Provisions

SM, Page 42  
One per student  
(one-third of class)

### Border 2012 Program

SM, Page 43  
One per student  
(one-third of class)

### International Agreement

SM, Pages 44–45  
One per student

# Procedures

## Vocabulary Development

As appropriate, in each lesson introduce new vocabulary words using the **Key Unit Vocabulary** (Lesson 1 Activity Master).

### Step 1

Ask students to think about the different ways that the United States and Mexico could resolve the environmental issues in the border region. Have students share some of their thoughts; write their responses on the board. (*The two nations could agree to change the allocation of the Colorado River water, sign treaties to give Mexico more economic aid in exchange for regulating byproducts from maquiladoras, support grassroots community efforts to clean up waste, provide grants to improve infrastructure in the region, and many other ways.*)

### Step 2

Point out that many of students' ideas call for the United States and Mexico to enter into some kind of agreement. Agreements among nations are called conventions or treaties. Explain that the two countries already have many such agreements and several programs designed to deal with environmental issues in the border region. Mention that they will be learning about three of those agreements and associated programs during this lesson.

### Step 3

Organize the students into three "expert" groups, explaining that each group will focus on one agreement or program. Distribute **The La Paz Agreement** (Lesson 5 Activity Master) to each student in one group, **NAFTA's Environmental Provisions** (Lesson 5 Activity Master) to each student in the second group, and **Border 2012 Program** (Lesson 5 Activity Master) to each student in the third group. Give all students a copy of **International Agreements** (Lesson 5 Activity Master).

Have each expert group read about its agreement or program, filling out the section of **International Agreements** that applies to their reading. Encourage students to talk within their groups to ensure that all group members have answered the questions correctly and understand the information well enough to teach it to others.

### Step 4

When the expert groups are done reading, discussing the information, and completing the appropriate section of **International Agreements**, direct students to form new groups of three. Each group of three should include one student from each of the expert groups. Each member of the new groups should use the structure of **International Agreements** to describe their agreement or program to the other students in the group. All students should use the information from their classmates to complete the rest of the chart on **International Agreements**.

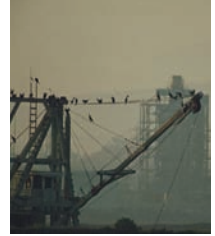
### Step 5

When students have completed their work on **International Agreements**, ask the class, "What kinds of issues cross international borders and require international agreements?" (*Accept students' opinions and thoughts.*)

Direct students to respond to the prompt at the bottom of **International Agreements**. Their responses should take the form of brief essays. They may take the rest of the class period to complete the essay or, if necessary, assign it as homework.

### Step 6

When students have completed their essays, collect their copies of the readings and **International Agreements** to use in assessment.



## Lesson Assessment

### Description

This lesson helps students identify international agreements between the United States and Mexico that regulate their shared environmental issues; students learn about a binational program (Border 2012), the environmental provisions in an international trade agreement (NAFTA), and an agreement (La Paz). Students identify details of the two agreements and the Border 2012 Program that relate to regulating the environmental issues on **International Agreements** (Lesson 5 Activity Master). They also write a brief essay responding to a question about why environmental issues influence international politics.

### Suggested Scoring

This is an ungraded activity.

## Answer Key and Sample Answers

### International Agreement

Lesson 5 Activity Master | page 1 of 2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Instructions:

1. In your expert group, read the background on your agreement or program. Use that information to fill in the appropriate column. Discuss the information with members of your group to be sure you understand the agreement and can teach your classmates about it.
2. You will join a group of three with members of the other two expert groups. In your new group, teach the other students about your international agreement or program using the chart on page 2 to organize your presentation.
3. When the other two members of your group teach about their agreements or program, fill in the information they give you in the appropriate columns.

How and why do environmental issues influence international politics?

*Many different kinds of environmental issues transcend international borders. For example, vehicle exhaust from urban areas goes into the air. Political boundaries do not contain this air basin, and pollutants can affect areas on both sides of the border.*

*The pollutants in the air can influence the health of the communities, which can in turn take its toll on the health care industry.*

*Another example of an environmental issue that crosses international borders is sewage deposited in a watershed in urban areas. That sewage can impact the people and natural systems on the other side of the border. The effects of the sewage on the ecosystems could discourage people from traveling to the area. This could hurt the tourist industry and the economy of the whole area.*

*Another serious issue found in the border region involves pesticides from agricultural areas which filter into the groundwater. The chemicals can then end up in aquifers that extend beyond the international boundary. This change in water quality can damage the ecosystems, which influence the livelihoods of the people who use the natural systems for economic purposes. All of these examples show how environmental issues can cross boundaries and influence economies and politics.*

## Answer Key and Sample Answers

## International Agreement

Lesson 5 Activity Master | page 2 of 2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Getting the Details of:	The La Paz Agreement	NAFTA's Environmental Provisions	Border 2012 Program
What is the background of the agreement/program? (When was it signed? What came before it? Why was it created?)	<i>It was signed in 1983. It was the first environmental agreement signed to work cooperatively on environmental problems. It was created to address the emerging environmental problems facing the border region.</i>	<i>These environmental provisions followed the La Paz Agreement and were signed at the same time as NAFTA (1993). They were created to address the environmental problems that would come from free trade.</i>	<i>This program came after the La Paz Agreement and NAFTA. It was created to ensure sustainable development in the border region using a bottom-up approach. Also, it was intended to implement the ideas in the La Paz Agreement.</i>
What are the main goals of the agreement or program?	<i>To protect and improve the environment in the border region.</i>	<i>To ensure enforcement of domestic laws and provide financing for environmental projects.</i>	<i>To protect the environment and public health of the border region.</i>
What, if any, are the drawbacks of the agreement/program?	<i>The agreement has not been fully implemented. Process is uneven. No emphasis was put on enforcing environmental laws.</i>	<i>The provisions are not funded well, and Mexico is supposed to give as much as money to environmental programs as the United States. Some are concerned about having environmental provisions in a trade agreement.</i>	<i>No drawbacks were stated in the reading.</i>



## The La Paz Agreement

The United States and Mexico first began to work together to address environmental problems in 1983. That year, the presidents of both countries signed the La Paz Agreement. The main goal of the La Paz Agreement was to protect and improve the environment of the border region. The agreement had three important parts.

The first part defined the border region as the area 62 miles (100 kilometers) north and south of the actual border. The two nations still use this definition of the border region today.

A second part of the agreement formed several working groups. Each working group specializes in a specific environmental issue: water, air, land, pollution prevention, and enforcement of environmental laws. Experts from both sides of the border serve on each of the working groups.

A third part of the agreement identified problems of immediate concern to both nations. These problems are sewage and waste in the Tijuana River, poor infrastructure in the border cities, illegal movement of hazardous waste from the United States into Mexico, and air pollution in the urban areas and at the border crossings.

Since the two nations signed the La Paz Agreement, progress has occurred, especially in addressing air quality problems. The La Paz Agreement opened up the dialogue between the United States and Mexico and created a structure for cooperation. However, in the decades following the agreement, environmental conditions along

the border continued to deteriorate. Some critics complain that progress is too slow. The La Paz Agreement does not specifically require enforcing the two nation's domestic environmental laws. Questions about the effectiveness of the agreement remain.



Trash and erosion—Los Laureles Canyon, Tijuana

Even with the concerns about the effectiveness of the agreement, the United States and Mexico continue to use this agreement. It has paved the way for other agreements. Several programs, including the Border 2012 Program (which another group is examining), were created to support the La Paz Agreement and resolve the issues it identified in 1983.

## NAFTA's Environmental Provisions

Canada, the United States, and Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993. This agreement had the goal of increasing trade through lowering tariffs and other federal laws that served to regulate commerce between the countries. At the time, many people were concerned about how the lowering of these trade barriers would affect the environment. What would happen if one country had weaker environmental laws than the others? Many companies would race to open factories in that country to avoid the cost of proper waste disposal or of meeting emissions standards. The other concern was that more trade would increase population and industrial growth in the region. This growth would affect the ecosystems of the border region. Because of these concerns, the United States and Mexico felt it was important to include environmental provisions in the trade agreement.

The leaders of Canada, the United States, and Mexico signed the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC) along with NAFTA. This agreement created the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). The CEC's goal is to improve environmental cooperation among the countries by providing a process for airing public concerns and settling disputes. The CEC also has the power to fine countries if they fail to enforce their own environmental laws.

The NAAEC recognized that, in order to protect and improve the environment of the

border region, environmental projects needed monetary support. Therefore, the agreement called for creation of two additional groups: The Border Environmental Cooperation Commission (BECC) and the North American Development Bank (NADB). The BECC helps communities in the border region design projects that will help improve and protect the environment. The NADB helps the community determine the costs of their projects. Once the cost is determined, NADB decides whether or not to give money to the community to begin the project.

People have several concerns regarding the NAAEC. First, NADB relies on the United States and Mexico to contribute equal amounts of money to support the projects that the communities create. Many wonder if it is fair to ask all the countries to contribute the same amount of money. A second concern is that NAFTA is a trade agreement, not an environmental agreement. Some believe that environmental issues will not get enough attention as part of a trade agreement, where improving the economy, not the environment, is the goal.



Maquiladora or assembly plant

## Border 2012 Program

The Border 2012 Program began in 2002. Its overall goal is to help carry out the efforts Mexico and the United States are making under the La Paz Agreement of 1983. It is active in the 14 "sister-cities" along the U.S.-Mexico border. Overall, the Border 2012 Program has six specific goals:

- Goal 1: Reduce Water Contamination
- Goal 2: Reduce Air Pollution
- Goal 3: Reduce Land Contamination
- Goal 4: Improve Environmental Health
- Goal 5: Establish Emergency Preparedness and Response Protocols
- Goal 6: Promote Environmental Stewardship

The Border 2012 Program is currently working on six projects. The first is providing adequate and clean water to the human and natural systems in the region. The second is improving the air quality in the region by decreasing the emissions from cars, industry, and urban sources. The third is decreasing land contamination resulting from the improper disposal of solid and hazardous waste. The fourth task is improving the health of the people who inhabit the region. The fifth task is developing an emergency response plan in the event of a natural or human-caused disaster in the region. The sixth task is increasing the environmental responsibility of local industries, especially the maquiladoras. The plan is to solve these problems and documented improvements by the year 2012.



Oil tank washed up on beach

2012 Program, local people and communities give their input and make decisions. People from the ten border states as well as the Indian nations living in the border region can actively participate in decisions about their environment.

The Border 2012 Program has been very successful in looking at the environmental problems, planning for changes, and implementing the changes. All interested parties in the border region continue to support the program.



